

INDEXA



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BQ9P—Pratas 2000 *by Paul Daley, WT8S*

“Have you read today's e-mail yet?”

It was extremely early in the morning on the first weekend of March. I had been up half the night trying to nail down #100 on 160 meters without much luck due to the high QRN. I finally recognized the voice on the landline as my good friend and fellow DXer, Leo, K8PYD. “What's up?” I asked. He replied that we each had an e-mail from Paul Pai, BV4FH, and that I should look at it ASAP!

I logged onto the Internet and, sure enough, there was an e-mail waiting for me from Paul and the BQ9P 2000 Committee inviting Leo and me to join the team for the April 2000 Pratas operation as RTTY/CW operators. We took all the time it takes for a DX QSO (599 TU QRZ UP) to make up our minds to go.

Since the Chinese Taipei Amateur Radio League (CTARL) and the BQ9P Committee had done all the detailed planning and equipment procurement for this major undertaking, all Leo and I had to do was to provide the RTTY capability—TNCs, software, cabling and connectors—for the transceivers already arranged for by CTARL. For those of you who have gone on a one- or two-man DXpedition as Leo (many times) and I have, this was not only a pleasure but it would be without a lot of the back-breaking lugging of equipment through airports!

A last-minute problem arose when we lost one of the few CW operators—Chung, BV4ME—to a work commit-



Operators: Jimmy BV4AS, Paul BV4FH, Bruce BV2KI, Johnson BV4DP, Sky BV8BC, Wang BV5CR, Leo K8PYD, Paul WT8S, Randy W9ZR, Hosokai JA1JKG.

ment. This left us with only 3 CW operators and two of us, K8PYD and myself, had to take care of all the RTTY as well. When would we sleep?

To the rescue came Randy, W9ZR, a fellow-member of the Central Ohio DX Association. With the blessing of the CTARL, Randy offered to go when Leo asked him, this despite the much higher airfare at such a late date. Paul and the CTARL did an outstanding job of expediting Randy's BV license and the other needed approvals.

As a significant bonus, W9ZR is one of the best “top-band” (160 meters) operators in the world. He immediately went about helping in this area by arranging for Beveridge equipment and procuring two more high-power amplifiers. He also set to working on the radial system plan for the low-band vertical, which was supplied by Titanex. Other verticals included a Cushcraft R-5 and R-7, and a Butter-nut HF9V. The Yagis were provided by Force 12 (3-12 C3S and 2-12 WARC). The amplifier lineup con-

(Continued on next page)

inside...

New Life Members

Extra Help

INDEXA Ballot 2000-2001

W6CNA—SK

BQ9P—2000.....from page 1

sisted of: 2 Yaesu FL-7000's; 2 Ameritron AL-811H's; 1 JRC-2000; 2 Dentrons and two new ACOM 2000A's which performed very well.

Sunday morning, April 2nd, came all too quickly. Randy, Leo, and I met at the airport in Columbus, Ohio, two hours before our flight. We each limited ourselves to one personal bag because we were carrying two amplifiers and associated gear in the other 3 allowable bags. The TNCs and laptops went in carry-on bags just to be sure we had the RTTY capability when we got to Taiwan.

We were met at the airport in Taipei by a van driver holding a sign, "K8PYD-W9ZR-WT8S". Paul Pai had arranged for the driver to take us to his city of Fengyuan in central Taiwan. The trip took 3 hours due to heavy rain and traffic resulting from the start of a national holiday (Room Of The Grave) honoring Taiwan ancestors. This holiday is somewhat equivalent to "spring break" in the states.

We were met by Paul and his XYL, Christine, who directed us to the "Maldives Motel" near their apartment. Naturally, we wondered if we could throw up an antenna and operate portable 8Q. We dropped this idea since we didn't think the DXCC desk would accept the operation—hi!

On Tuesday morning, April 4th, Paul picked up our luggage in his vehicle but we walked to his QTH with Christine. Soon after getting to Paul's apartment, Johnson, BV4DP; and Wang, BV5CR; arrived and we had breakfast. Half an hour later our bus arrived from Taipei with the rest of the team and more than a ton of equipment and antennas. We met Jimmy, BV4AS; Bruce, BV2KI; and Teruji, JA1JKG; and we all loaded more equipment and antennas from Paul's QTH onto the bus.

The entire team, except for Sky, BV8BC, traveled by bus to the southern Taiwanese city of Kaohsiung, the second largest city in the country. Our flight to Pratas would leave the next morning so we spent the night in a motel that was within walking distance of the military airfield.

Naturally, the first thing we did was

assemble an R-7 on the roof of the motel and connect it to one of the FT-990s. Our first attempt didn't work, probably because we had partially supported the mast against a TV antenna. After relocating the R-7 we fired-up and worked Phil, 9M6CT, on 20 meters as BX0DX. Phil wished us well and word was out that the BQ9P team was only a day away from firing-up from Pratas on schedule.

Everyone was hungry so we left for supper at a nearby restaurant where Sky joined us to complete the team. After eating we met to go over plans for erecting the antennas and stations the next day. The BV team members had done an excellent job of laying out the operating positions and antennas and we only made a few last-minute changes. The goal was to get all the Yagis up on Wednesday, April 5th, and to have one SSB station operating that day.

After too little sleep, we woke before sunrise on Wednesday and loaded a truck with several tons of equipment to take to the military airfield. It was so close that the entire team walked there together. At the base we were grateful to the military personnel who transferred everything to the C-130 for the one-hour flight to Pratas. For those of you who have never flown on this type of aircraft, it is very noisy and uses web-type seating with the cargo right next to you. Needless to say, there was no in-flight food or beverage service and no frequent flyer miles! We took off at 9:50 local time (1:50 UTC) through a low ceiling and had hardly stopped climbing before we began our descent to Pratas, landing at 11:03 a.m.

After transporting our equipment and baggage to our Pratas QTH, a 6-room barrack near the shore of the South China Sea, we immediately started to assemble the antennas. The island military personnel were very helpful in this set up. Leo and I assembled all three Force 12 C3S antennas because we had assembled that antenna before on previous DXpedi-

tions.

The main antenna mast was an old army field tower that easily supported both a Force 12 C3S and a two-element 40 meter Cushcraft antenna. As we started to raise the tower, Murphy almost got my right hand when it got caught with the guy rope wrapped around it with the tower slipping and the person behind me yanking on the same rope. Then, as we were raising one of the verticals, it broke and missed my head on the way down by a foot or two. For some reason, everyone avoided me while raising the rest of the antennas!

BQ9P on the air

Paul made the first QSO with JI1OQH at 9:02 UTC on 15 meter SSB and BQ9P was on the air! The first night the BV part of the team worked 15 and 20 meter SSB, while Teru-san, JA1JKG, ran a pileup almost all night on 40 meter CW. Paul is an excellent CW operator and made a lot of people happy that night.

On Thursday we got our third Force 12 C3S up and started 10 meter operation. There was good propagation to the USA west of the Mississippi on SSB in the morning and to Europe on CW in the afternoon.

The first RTTY QSO was with W6/G0AZT on April 8th at 04:21 UTC. The second was with JR1KSK at 04:25. We previously had copied W6KUT but we had audio gain problems with the FT-990, which we solved thanks to the help and patience of W6KUT.

At lunch on Sunday, April 9th, the Pratas Island base commander and vice-commander visited us. Both had been extremely helpful to the DXpedition. Unfortunately, the author tried to acknowledge their hospitality by participating in the Taiwanese custom of "kan-pei" (bottoms up on cool 807s)! To those of you who had to copy my lousy fist or poor RTTY for a few hours afterwards, I apologize!

On Tuesday, April 11th, our last full day of operation, the bands once again faded their midday fade. Even though signal levels weren't good enough for RTTY on 15 and 20 meters, 10 and 12 were open

and I worked CW on both, running my CW total for the week up to about 2000. I was "forced" to work some SSB when needed and worked about 400 on that mode. But, of course, my favorite mode (RTTY) added about 600 QSOs (K8PYD and I about split the 1200 RTTY QSO total to date). That meant some 3000 QSOs for me in 5 days.

At 4 p.m. local time, BQ9P had to QRT for about 3 hours for a tour of the island, guided by Vice-Commander Lu. We then had a wonderful meal hosted by Commander Bear. We expressed our appreciation for all their help with the customary "toasts" common in the far east and Russia. This time, the author had to limit the "807s" and especially the excellent Taiwanese liquor in order to be ready for the last night of RTTY.

Wednesday, April 12th, was dedicated to tearing down and packing all but 2 antennas. The entire digital and low band capability was shutdown, leaving only 2 SSB stations on the air on Wednesday night.

"Good Morning!"

I woke and looked at my watch. It was 5:30 a.m. and Bruce was waking us on our last day on Pratas to tear down the last two 12 C3S antennas. The BV part of the team packed-up the stations and associated equipment while the USA part worked on the Yagis. Not only did these Force 12 antennas work perfectly on the air, they were a dream to setup and tear down—perfect for a DXpedition. One tip to those of you who might want to consider taking them on a DXpedition: K8PYD found out that these antennas work fine for such a short time without using a riveting tool. Simply put the rivets in the holes to connect pieces of the elements and then put good quality electrical tape through the ends of the rivets and wrap it around the elements several times. Whatever slight SWR effect these "mini-radiators" on the elements might have is more than offset by the hours and hours of time saved erecting and tearing down the antennas, plus, the rivets are reusable! We have used this trick successfully on a number of

DXpeditions.

Randy made a good suggestion for modification. He suggested cutting off the ends of the rivets on installation so that there was just enough left to be able to pull the rivets out by hand on tear-down. This would also make it easier to tape the rivets in place on setup.

How did we do?

We made more than 31,000 QSOs in less than 7 full days of operation: roughly half on CW and half on SSB, plus more than 1300 RTTY QSOs. While the final statistics still are to be reviewed, we believe that almost 1200 different stations were worked out of the 1300 total QSOs.

The return flight from Pratas to Kaohsiung was a chartered commercial prop flight carrying a lot of happy military people home to leave in Taiwan, as well as a lot of happy DXers. We connected at Kaohsiung for the flight back to Taipei, arriving around 3 p.m. on Thursday, April 13th. Teru-san, JA1JKG; Jimmy, BV4AS; and Bruce, BV2KI; went with us on the flight to Taipei. We had to say good-bye to the team organizer, Paul, BV4FH; Sky, BV8BC; Wang, BV5CR; and Johnson, BV4DP; at the airport in Kaohsiung. We said good-bye to the team leader Jimmy, BV4AS; Bruce; and Teru-san at the airport in Taipei.

The stateside crew arrived at the domestic airport in Taipei. Because of all the RTTY equipment, two amplifiers and personal luggage we were carrying, the three of us had to take two taxis to the

Chang Kai-shek Hotel at the international airport of the same name. Once again, the ham fraternity helped out. Paul called ahead to Yuki, BV3BV, who was one of the managers of the hotel. He arranged for a special room rate and answered all our questions about touring, shopping and eating the next day in Taipei. Thanks to Yuki and the hotel for their consideration.

Saturday morning, April 15th (hope I remembered to file all my tax returns), we awoke at 6:30 a.m. to get to the airport for our 20+-hour trip back to Columbus, Ohio. This is 4 hours shorter than the trip over due to tailwinds and connection times. However, we only had a 50-minute connection time between the Taipei to Tokyo flight and the Tokyo to Minneapolis one and we were a little worried about that! It turned out that we had nothing to worry about. We made all our connections and arrived home safely, very tired but very happy on Saturday evening, April 15th, 2000.

The author would like to thank all of the BQ9P team, and especially our leader Jimmy, BV4AS, and our organizer Paul Pai, BV4FH, for a wonderful adventure. Thanks go to all the other DXers mentioned in this article who helped in one way or another. Also, thanks again to Commander Bear and Vice-Commander Lu on Pratas Island. An extra special thanks to INDEXA for its generous support. As a life-member of INDEXA it is great to see how our donations are well spent giving the deserving a new one. QSL requests for this operation go via Steve Wheatley, KU9C.

New Life Members.....

KJ7SJ W2YC N3HIS K1PL JA3APV and JA1CPS

Extra Help Provided By.....

NN4S	W1HEO	JH3EQQ	W1VW	K4SB	W4LM	W3ODJ	KJ6OW
N8QYO	W1WRN	W5KFN	KA3VIY	KM4LS	NI6P	N9KVI	K7EWG
N3RB	WA9FWO	W4PJI	WA4QQF	KR6DE	W6YHM	JL1RML	VE2WY
OE5CMN	SM5OJH	KJ7SJ	DJ9ZB	WA8OXB	KJ6CA	W9OSN	AA8CH
N3HIS	K1PL	JA3APV	AA5XE	KB1EFS	ZP3CTW	JA1CPS	JA5CEX
KB9RPX	KC1ML	and	W8WOJ				

Ballot 2000-2001

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Vice-Pres.	AA7UC			
Sec.-Treas.	W4UNP			
Directors	ZL1AMO			
	DJ9ZB			

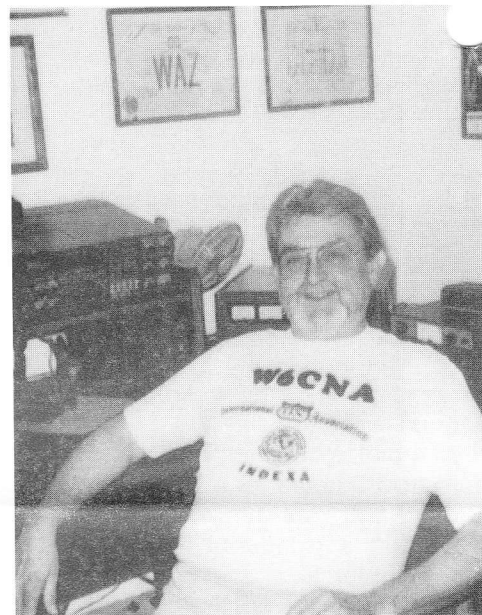
Please vote and return your ballot to the election officer no later than 30 September 2000.

Bill Jennings, W4UNP
 Secretary-Treasurer, INDEXA
 630 Whitepine Drive
 Catawba, SC 29704 U.S.A.

W6CNA—Silent Key

Richard Gallion, W6CNA, served amateurs since 1984 as an INDEXA staff member. On 10 June 2000 he became a SK.

Most who talked to him could actually hear the smile on his face. Even if you were down on the world, a good chat with the "nasty alligator" somehow seemed to make you feel better about life. During our last conversation the subject of his many problems came up. He was told that the prognosis for his latest health problem didn't look good. But Richard had faith and hope during the entire time. Even with the darkness about to come, he still joked and laughed. That was Richard.



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